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ABSTRACT

Findings of a case study that examined restructuring and organizational change in a California school district over a 12-year period are presented in this paper. The research draws upon the conceptual framework of "adaptive realignment," a process in which an organization continually responds to external and internal changes as they occur. Data were derived from document analysis of district records and two phases of interviews. The first interviews were conducted with a total of 22 respondents: 2 superintendents, 3 board members, 3 central office administrators, 5 teachers, and 9 principals. The second stage involved 11 of the original sample. Shifting goals and strategies, an alternating locus of organizational control, poorly defined methods of sustaining change, and administrative turnover were identified as the dynamics that contributed to a seemingly incoherent pattern of adaptive realignment. When initial efforts to restructure the district through school-based management appeared unsuccessful, school officials ultimately chose short-term bureaucratic remedies to solve longstanding systemic problems. Conclusions are that: (1) a large gap exists between the rhetoric and reality of restructuring; (2) political community pressure for change may accelerate the process; and (3) models of school-based autonomy and centralized support may be integrated in practice. (Contains 43 references.) (LMI)

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School District Restructuring and the Search for Coherence: A Case Study of Adaptive Realignment and Organizational Change

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School District Restructuring and the Search for Coherence: A Case Study of Adaptive Realignment and Organizational Change

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This case study examines restructuring and organizational change over a twelve year period in a California school district. Shifting goals and strategies, an alternating locus of organizational control, poorly defined methods of sustaining change, and administrative turnover are identified as the dynamics causing a seemingly incoherent pattern of adaptive realignment. When initial efforts to restructure the district through school-based management appeared unsuccessful, school officials ultimately chose short-term bureaucratic remedies to solve longstanding systemic problems.

The popularity of school restructuring as the preferred solution to the problems of public education is a well-known phenomenon. Much has been written about restructuring and many ideas associated with it have been central to the critical dialogue about how to improve learning in America's schools. Yet our knowledge of how school officials define restructuring and what strategies they pursue is surprisingly limited. As Fullan (1991) observes, "There is a strong conceptual rationale for the importance of restructuring schools, but there is not much empirical evidence of its positive effects. We are still at the early stages of restructuring experiments, which should serve to help clarify the concept and debug how it might best be implemented" (p.88).

This case study of a California school district is stimulated by Fullan's call for a better understanding of restructuring. My purpose is to describe and analyze school district restructuring in Sequoia Valley School District as a complex form of organizational change which transpired over a period of twelve years.[1]

The relevance of this case to the study of restructuring in other districts is that Sequoia Valley School District bore the problems common to many American school districts in recent years: a rapidly changing student population, an aging core of teachers and administrators out of touch with instructional innovation, and limited financial resources for supporting educational reform. Over a twelve year period, Sequoia Valley demonstrated a mix of resiliency and inertia not atypical of other districts engaged in organizational change. It reflected bright signs of vision and adaptiveness. It also revealed vulnerability, conflict, and intermittent incoherence in its struggle to transform education in its schools.

Many of the events and conditions that interweave this case also are not especially unique when compared with others (Firestone, Fuhrman, et al., 1990; Fuhrman, Cune, et al., 1988). Consistent with most organizations, decision makers and other participants came and went over time; goals shifted and strategic preferences were realigned; and people fought over who would make key decisions and by what means (Cohen & March, 1983). Because these factors are not unusual in the context of the literature on organizational change and restructuring, the case of Sequoia Valley offers a realistic perspective of the liabilities and opportunities inherent to a such complex undertaking.

THE PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF SCHOOL DISTRICT RESTRUCTURING: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Multiple Visions of Change: The Ambiguity of Restructuring

The school restructuring movement has left in its wake compelling new visions of schooling but also growing ambiguity and concern about the goals and dynamics of systemic change. Restructuring has come to mean fundamental changes in the way students are taught, in the way decisions about curriculum and instruction are made, and in the way power is distributed between the classroom, school, and central office. Restructuring is about changing the conditions in which students best learn and teachers best perform, and about how schools can best organize to provide for both. Restructuring requires renewed parent participation, more involvement with the community, and a more collaborative relationship between administrators and union officials. Restructuring means increasing local accountability but also tightening the alignment between district, state, and national goals. Restructuring redefines the role of students and the work of the teachers and administrators who educate them.

Programs and prescriptions for effective restructuring abound. Strategic planning, shared vision, school-based management, outcome-based education, school-site councils, authentic assessment, national testing, collaborative trust agreements, schools of choice, cooperative learning, integrated thematic instruction, multi-graded classrooms, etc. -- all have been promoted and utilized, in various combinations for various purposes, in the name of restructuring.

This smorgasbord of ideas and programs has helped sustain the restructuring movement's initial appeal because there appears to be

something in it for everyone of all pedagogical and political persuasions. Michael Kirst's apt assessment that, "Restructuring is a word that means everything and nothing simultaneously. . . . It is in the eye of the beholder." (quoted in Olson, 1988, p. 1), underscores the problem of clarifying the definition and direction of educational reform efforts. As a slogan for rallying support for unspecified change, restructuring has served to galvanize concern and generate solutions for a variety of problems in education. But as a term pregnant with a multitude of goals and programmatic synonyms, restructuring also has led to fragmentation and the lack of coherence (Fullan, 1991).

Districts unable to provide clear guidelines for goal setting run the risk of becoming stuck at a very early and critical stage (Rosenholtz, 1989). Indeed, the seemingly simple choices of *who* makes the decision for a school district to restructure and *what* that definition of restructuring will be, may proscribe the change process from its inception. As Elmore (1990b) suggests, "As long as the theme of school restructuring is fluid and unspecified, it functions well as a rallying point for reformers. But once the theme is defined, it may begin to divide rather than unite diverse political interests" (p. 4).

Ownership and Integration

School district officials who introduce restructuring as a strategic vehicle for achieving a new set of organizational goals immediately face the problems of ownership and control. Hargreaves (1991) believes that this initial choice is a critical one as policymakers may be forced to decide

> between restructuring as bureaucratic control, where teachers are controlled and regulated to implement the mandates of others, and restructuring as professional empowerment, where teachers are

> supported, encouraged and provided with newly structured opportunities to make improvement of their own, in partnership with parents, principals, and students. (p. 7)

This organizational and political schism does not mean that restructuring must neatly conform to either a bureaucratic or a grassroots mold. There can be no doubt that organizational innovation is extremely complex and multidimensional, ultimately involving all levels of the organization (Joyce & Showers, 1988). This dichotomy leads us to see, however, that attention must be paid to the vested interests at both the top and bottom of the organization if a politically acceptable and and organizationally functional balance of power is to be be achieved.

David's (1991) findings from restructuring school districts echo the notion that success depends on the internal coordination between superintendents and school boards on one hand, and teachers and administrators on the other.

> The success of restructuring hinges on the ability of people at all levels of the system to change. If restructuring is viewed as something schools can do with only a token increase in authority and no other changes, most schools will never even know what restructuring is about. And the few schools that create exciting learning environments will be constantly threatened by a new superintendent, school board member, or principal, because support for change is not built into the system. (p. 15)

Successful change, she finds, cannot be mandated. Teachers and school leaders must be "invited" to participate. There must be a substantial shift of authority and flexibility from the top of the school district to the school site and classroom. Teachers must be given access to the the knowledge, skills,

and resources necessary to transform their classroom practices. And administrators and board members must patiently allow for sufficient time for schools and classrooms to develop.

The amount of time needed to successfully restructure a school or a school district cannot be predicted. Specific innovations may take two to three years to adopt, while institutional reform can take five years or more (Fullan, 1991). More importantly, the set of innovations being sought must become integrated into the structure of the organization until it has been accepted by a "critical mass" of teachers and administrators (Huberman & Miles, 1984).

Sustaining Change

The identification of essential conditions for restructuring school districts mentioned above fits well with Louis and Miles' (1990) conceptual framework for understanding successful restructuring of the school. In their study of urban high schools they found that success depended on the balance between the vision-building and evolutionary planning of school leaders and the initiative and input from the bottom of the organization. By pursuing unexpected opportunities and capitalizing on failed risks, change in the school organization becomes an open process that invites participation and encourages risk. The development of a collaborative work culture, in which teachers and administrators become equally empowered, is essential for successful implementation. Like David, Louis and Miles emphasize the need for adequate staff development and resource assistance throughout a sustained change cycle, which is typically characterized from adoption and implementation, through continued monitoring and realignment, to the

achievement of outcomes (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Fullan, 1991; Huberman & Miles, 1984).

The realignment of goals and strategy in the middle of a change cycle raises interesting questions for the study of organizational adaptation. At what point is realignment no longer a measure of organizational adaptiveness and health? When does realignment become over-reaction, constituting a literal make-over of direction and purpose? When do minor improvements to the overall process constitute astute adjustments, and when do they amount to no more than tinkering, which may result in the lack of coherence and fragmentation mentioned earlier?

There are, of course, no easy answers to these questions for either school leaders or researchers. The fact that life in organizations can be unpredictable, loosely-coupled, non-linear, and chaotic is well-documented (Cohen & March, 1983; Cziko, 1989; Griffiths, Hart, et al., 1991; Sergiovanni, 1991; Weick, 1982). Continual monitoring and adjustment, albeit in a variety of patterns and roles, to this turbulent and dynamic environment is a necessary task of effective school leaders (Cuban, 1988; Sergiovanni, 1990). But over-attention to environmental noise and perturbation can result in loosing sight of the original goals of restructuring or in becoming too absorbed in the dynamics of change rather than its outcomes.

Elmore (1990a) contends that the capacity of "adaptive realignment" is necessary to sustain successful restructuring. But in contrast to the promise of a sweeping transformation of all aspects of schooling, "school restructuring, then, will become a series of strategic responses to a set of pressing problems, organized around a certain set of themes, rather than a comprehensive template for the transformation of schools" (p. 294).

Adaptive realignment may not be sufficient by itself, however, to guarantee that the conditions of teaching and learning will be fundamentally altered. For adaptive realignment to have a significant effect

> specific restructuring efforts in specific settings have to be informed by a broad agenda that puts the conditions of teaching and learning at the center of restructuring and also creates political and professional networks with an interest in reinforcing that agenda that transcends states and localities. (Elmore, 1990a, p. 295)

Elmore adds a note of caution that districts may be enticed into "coopting" restructuring without sufficient external pressure or strong ties to the larger reform agenda. He fears districts will be induced by the glamour or popularity of restructuring to "adopt the rhetoric of reform without altering their organization or modes of operation". Without any political pressure to change, districts may not be forced to adopt even the rhetoric of change and therefore will remain embedded in standard institutional practice.

Improvement Versus Institutional Reform

As in the case of adaptive realignment, the definition of genuine organizational change can be highly interpretive. How do we distinguish between organizational improvement, structural reform, and tinkering (Tyack, 1990)? What is "real" change and what is the illusion or coopted rhetoric of change (Watzlawick, 1976)? How much "restructuring" is enough to be called restructuring (Barth, 1991)?

Cuban (1989) offers a simple but useful framework for analyzing school district reform. 'First-order' changes are "those that assume that the existing organizational goals and structures are basically adequate and that what needs to be done is to correct deficiencies in policies and practices" (p. 266). 'Second-

order' changes "aim to alter the fundamental ways of achieving organizational goals or to introduce new goals and interventions that transform familiar ways of doing things into novel solutions to persistent problems" (p. 266). Cuban adds that second order change is not likely to occur without a clear vision, an enlightened school board, and a sense of crisis within the school organization. As discussed later in this paper, Cuban's distinction provides a basis for better identifying the modality of intervention in each of the change episodes Sequoia Valley experienced.

Hall (1991) states that getting participants to agree on the same version of what kind of change process they are in is "wasteful and debilitating". But the problem of having school officials believe (or report) that meaningful results have taken place when teachers and principals have been only confused or frustrated by a change process is not uncommon (Charters & Pellegrin, 1973; Huberman & Miles, 1984; Loucks & Hall, 1979). Although the perception of the "reality" of change cannot be truly validated (Wolcott, 1990), the importance for sharing a common language, communicating experience and expectations, and maintaining consensus throughout the organization is all the more profound.

Early Evidence of Restructuring School Districts

Despite the ambiguity of restructuring and the complexity of organizational change there is evidence that reform is indeed possible. Diverse "pioneering" districts such as Dade County, Rochester, San Diego, Edmonds (Washington), Jefferson County (Kentucky), Santa Fe, East Harlem and others have demonstrated that systemwide restructuring can be achieved (Carnoy & MacDonnell, 1990; Cuban, 1989; David, 1990; David, 1991; Urbanski, 1990). The success of these districts illustrates that the definition of

restructuring, the organizational change strategy employed, and the types of outcomes achieved vary greatly from district to district. What these school districts share in common is the evolution of a new system of values, organizational features and relationships, as well as a new structure of organizational decisionmaking as each broke from their unique but traditional molds.

Not all pioneering districts, however, have enjoyed initial or continued success. Chicago's attempt to decentralize school board authority was obstructed by an Illinois State Supreme Court ruling. Rochester's "experiment" in further extending its innovative contract between the local AFT and the Rochester School Board was eroded by successive contract rejections by both sides. Unstable fiscal support has also retarded the early momentum of the restructuring movement. Districts in states such as Connecticut, Oregon, California, Oklahoma, and Massachusetts have had local reform initiatives frustrated by severe cutbacks in education due to state financial crises. Because most of the pioneering districts have been engaged in restructuring for only a few years, we have yet to know much about their adaptive capacity in light of administrative turnover, financial crisis, and other common but threatening maladies.

The Effect of Administrator Turnover

Further adding to the dilemma of sustaining successful district restructuring is rapid superintendent turnover, particularly in large urban districts where time is needed to splice external constituencies for support and build consensus for change with teachers and site administrators. The frequency of turnover has had demonstrable and often negative impact on districts. For example, in the summer of 1991, 28 of the 45 districts of the

Great City School Council were looking for a superintendent or had one with less than two years of tenure (Bradley, 1990).

This crisis has prompted serious speculation about the viability of the conventional board/superintendent governance structure to sustain even modest improvements in complex organizations, not to mention providing leadership for systemic reform. As former Atlanta Superintendent Alonzo Crim points out, "The tragedy when you get that rapid turnover is that nothing gets done. Each person is only going to be able to accomplish three or four major changes at best, and you need stability to build a constituency to support those causes and get the job done"(quoted in Bradley, 1990, p. 34).

The effect of administrator turnover on organizations, including school organizations, can vary greatly (Firestone, 1990; Ogawa, 1991). A new leader's presence may be threatening or reinforcing, or it may signal continuity or disruption of current values and practices. Carslon (1962) found that successors who come from outside the organization may have much greater opportunity to change the status quo than those who are promoted from within. Unfortunately, Carlson's study is one of the few dealing with superintendent succession in school districts and limited empirical data exists in this important area. However, the succession of leaders unquestionably has an effect on the organization from a symbolic perspective (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Feldman & March, 1981). The choice of the successor to the chief administrator signals the importance attached to the choice, be it maintainance of the status quo or a bold departure from the goals and norms of the organization, thereby communicating expectations and direction.

Summary

The problems associated with school district restructuring and organizational change appear to be weighted heavily against the likelihood of success. Restructuring is a complex process requiring a delicate but durable balance between central office authority and school autonomy. Successful implementation depends on the capacity of the organization to respond to unanticipated problems (e.g., superintendent turnover) and to realign around revised goals and newly defined solutions as preferences and conditions shift over time. Restructuring may take five years or more, provided that sufficient resources are available. It cannot be mandated and it must include the consent and understanding of at least a "critical mass" of participants located throughout the organization. Often, educational change cannot be sustained without significant external pressure.

There are a limited number of examples of successful restructuring school districts in the literature. This is most likely due to the recency of the restructuring movement, but it may also reflect the preference of school officials and others to define restructuring as a important process for schools but less so for entire school district organizations. I was unable to find any study that attempted to "capture the phenomena"[2] of restructuring as it became defined and grafted on to a prior episode of planned organizational change, which constitutes the context of this case.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The overarching theme of "adaptive realignment" provides a useful conceptual framework in which to examine the pattern of change in school district restructuring in this case (Elmore, 1990a). The predominant

perspective derived from the mosaic of the literature is that restructuring cannot be viewed as a single event in time, nor a linear process driven by a stable set of goals and strategies. Restructuring, if is to be successful, is an adaptive process whereby the official decisionmakers and other participants in a school district must respond to any number of dynamics both internal and external to the organization as change occurs over time. They must then realign around newly revised goals, strategies, or themes in order to sustain organizational momentum and direction.

The broad pattern of adaptive realignment is comprised of a series of complex responses, choices, or preferences. In the short run, a minor redefinition of goals or a modification of the methods for achieving original goals may likely call for a subtle adjustment in the school district organization, having little impact in the lives of teachers, administrators, or students. Over a period of many years, however, the accumulation of minor change episodes may have a profound effect on the overall success and direction of school district restructuring. This may be the case especially when strategic choices and preferences remain ambiguous or deviate too far from the original vision, and thereby create a disjointed or arbitrary pattern of response and adaptation. Therefore, a close analysis the pattern of adaptive realignment helps us understand whether the choices and preferences of school district decisionmakers ultimately constitute coherent change or result in the dissipation organizational focus.

There are two fundamental approaches to describing and analyzing the complexities of the educational change process in school organizations which further illuminate the process of adaptive realignment (Fullan, 1991). The first approach identifies a list of key factors which are associated with a specific innovation and its implementation which proves most useful in isolating

and explaining specific roles of people and events. The second approach depicts the central themes of the change process. A number of broad dynamics or themes are woven together through the interaction of people, events, and conditions in organizations undergoing change. The thematic approach is more likely to capture the "dynamic and vivid picture of the change process" (p. 81) and the broader pattern of adaptive realignment, and for that reason it is used in this study.

The themes identified in the literature, which provide the conceptual framework for this study are: 1) organizational vision and goals; 2) ownership and locus of control of restructuring; 3) sustaining change; and 4) administrative turnover.

The limitation of the thematic approach is that it cannot capture the countless events and individual factors which may account for particular changes within Sequoia Valley School District and its fourteen individual schools over a twelve year period. Many of the events at the school and classroom level are simply overlooked. Indeed, there is a danger that even a single "small effect" may account for very large effects throughout the organization (Griffiths, Hart, et al., 1991). Recent studies of school restructuring, however, have successfully employed the approach of tracing key themes and their causal relationship to the direction taken by changing school organizations (Louis & Miles, 1990; Marsh, 1988; Miles, 1987; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988).

METHODS

A single case study research design was employed to account for the pattern of events, conditions, and the dynamics of organizational change and restructuring from 1979 to 1991 (Yin, 1984). The research questions, data

collection, and data analysis were designed to help describe and analyze these elements from a holistic perspective using Sequoia Valley School District organization as the unit of study.

Given the set of four themes which comprise the broader pattern of organizational change, the following questions were used to further focus the events of this study and formed the basis of the interview protocol:

1. How were the vision, goals, and strategies of Sequoia Valley School District initially defined? How and why did they change over time?

2. As restructuring evolved, how did the pattern of governance, decisionmaking, and input from teachers, administrators, parents, and members of the community change?

3. How was restructuring monitored and in what ways did Sequoia Valley sustain its change process?

4. What effect did administrative turnover have on restructuring?

Data collection consisted of a review of primary documents related to the planning and implementation of restructuring in Sequoia Valley. *Strategic Planning in the Sequoia Valley School District* (Sequoia Valley, 1987) was of particular help in documenting the goals and strategies of restructuring initiated in 1986. Superintendent Hilton Byers provided me with a synopsis of early Sequoia Valley School District history, which he prepared for presentation in a class he taught at a local San Francisco university. This report offered a thorough description of Sequoia Valley from 1979 to 1985, just prior to the adoption of Sequoia Valley's Strategic Plan.

Two rounds of formal interviews were held in the fall of 1990 and the spring of 1991 respectively. In the first round, twenty-two people were interviewed: the past and current superintendent, three board members, three central office administrators, five teachers, and nine principals. My

objective was to obtain case data from individuals who were in key administrative and governance roles, as well as others who were involved directly in committee work and staff development activities related to restructuring. Fourteen of those interviewed were employed by Sequoia Valley throughout the twelve years of this case and had good knowledge of their school district's recent history since the late 1970s.

The first analysis of the data was conducted after this first round of interviews to sequence events and characterize the initial themes expressed in the conceptual framework. The data were pattern coded by theme and position held by the interviewee (superintendent, principal, teacher, etc.) (Miles & Huberman, 1984). From this data emerged a broad pattern of organizational realignment which fell roughly into five time periods. No new themes were added, nor any deleted from my original framework as a result of this first round of interviews and analysis.

A second round of interviews and analysis were then conducted to further clarify the sequence of events and better characterize the themes and their influence on the evolution of restructuring in Sequoia Valley School District. Eleven of the original interviewees were questioned again to confirm or respond to my interpretation of events, themes, and the patterns of organizational change. Included in this second round were the two superintendents, two board members, one central office administrator, four principals, and two of the teachers. An additional two teachers, not part of the first round, were included in the second round of interviews. These latter two were selected because of their special role in developing districtwide performance-based assessment indicators in 1990-91, a primary objective of the new superintendent. I chose the individuals for this second round of follow-up interviews because of their proven insight to the school district's

activities and of their ability to discuss the themes and dynamics of change which emerged in the first round of interviews.

An initial draft of this paper was given to both superintendents, one board member, and two principals for reaction. I received extensive written feedback from Hilton Byers and I conducted three informal phone interviews with the board member and principals to receive feedback from the initial draft.

THE CASE OF SEQUOIA VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Setting

Sequoia Valley School District is a K-8 school system located in the San Francisco Bay Area. It encompasses white upper class enclaves, Mexican-American barrios, and traditional working class neighborhoods. Similar to California's entire student population, Sequoia Valley's student population is sixty percent racial-ethnic minority,[3] much of which is first and second generation Hispanic. Sequoia Valley's two middle schools are racially balanced by a gerrymandered pattern of feeder schools. Eleven elementary schools closely match the socio-economic make-up of their respective neighborhoods. Four schools are over eighty percent minority while five are less than forty percent minority. Only two elementary schools are comprised of the 60/40 racial balance of the entire district. There is also an additional alternative elementary school which draws students from throughout the school district. Despite the obvious problem of segregation, Sequoia Valley has been immune from any serious threat of desegregation litigation. As one board member stated, "the community is just not going to put up with

busing". No political or special interest group has ever seriously threatened to contest the de facto segregation of its elementary schools.

Because of its close geographic proximity to many affluent Bay Area school districts and communities, a description of Sequoia Valley invites a comparison to its neighbors. On either side of the city, neighboring communities have welcomed large, fashionable shopping malls and have attracted a variety of hi-tech corporations and other white collar industries. A national research university is situated only a few miles away. Three professional sports teams are also housed within a few minutes by car down a connecting freeway. Drab warehouses, faceless industrial parks, a major chemical corporation, and an unexceptional downtown business area comprise Sequoia Valley's central corridor, which helps divide white from minority, affluent from poor. Sequoia Valley is known as a quiet and attractive suburban bedroom community for the middle classes and also as an affordable refuge for the working poor and recent immigrants in search of work.

Sequoia Valley School District's per student income is one-third lower than many of the surrounding districts due to its disproportionately low local revenue base. Sequoia Valley teachers are paid less than their colleagues in nearby districts. Its school buildings appear older and less attractive than those in neighboring districts. Nearly half of its elementary schools maintain bilingual programs. In recent years, the number of "at-risk" youth has mushroomed. Accompanying that change, the number of special education referrals and calls to the local Child Protective Service has also risen sharply. Homelessness, gang activity, drug use . . . all have become common features in the fabric of the Sequoia Valley community as they have in all urban settings in California.

SVSD also suffers from a low "test score image" in the public eye. Individual school test score averages are published by local newspapers and are commonly used by realtors. Though SVSD's "better" schools are competitive test score-wise with schools in other districts, its districtwide average is comparatively low -- conveying an message that education in Sequoia Valley is inferior to other districts. As a result, many white middle class families have enrolled their children in private schools. Some have found various means of registering their children in neighboring districts, often fabricating home addresses or invoking a state regulation which allows families to enroll their children in the school district in which they work.

Sequoia Valley is a pastiche of diverse geographic, political, and socio-economic pockets. A significant portion of the city is considered a safe and attractive community for raising children. The poor and ethnic sections of town although not desirable to middle class whites, are viewed also as family-oriented. By comparison to other urban centers in the Bay Area such as Oakland and San Jose, Sequoia Valley has been relatively free of overt racial strife. Without an expansive local economy and with little total population growth within its boundaries, local politics have been relatively mundane. The attitude of the citizenry toward its schools seems to be less than satisfactory. Yet over the past decades, parents and others in the community have been, if not supportive, then accepting of the status quo of its schools. Previous superintendents, and many administrators and board members have enjoyed long tenures devoid of serious conflict or political action threatening to remove them from power. Criticism of Sequoia Valley schools has been endemic, and has manifested only in calls for improvement, never for major reform or radical change.

New Superintendent and Districtwide Revitalization

The selection of Hilton Byers as the new superintendent of Sequoia Valley School District in 1979 was an uncontested and welcomed move by the Sequoia Valley School Board[4]. For the previous nine years, the popular Byers had served as the district's Assistant Superintendent for Personnel. Endowed with an affable and easygoing manner, Byers was liked and respected by teachers, many of whom he had hired. As one teacher put it, "Hilton was the kind of guy that remembered you and everything about you. He was always kind, always had a joke for you, and made you feel special. He always had time to listen. . . . Most of the district's teacher were thrilled when Hilton became superintendent."

The condition of the district Byers inherited was in his words "a dismal picture". The previous superintendent had been disliked by teachers for his remote and autocratic style. Like other California districts, Sequoia Valley was still adjusting to the cutbacks caused by Proposition 13, which had returned school revenue limits to those in 1972. Enrollment was declining rapidly, the business manager had just resigned, there was no central office administrator for curriculum and instruction, and there was a $300,000 budget deficit.

Members of the Board expressed to Byers from outset their belief that Sequoia Valley had fallen into serious disarray and that a thorough revamping of the entire school district's direction and operations were needed. The charge given to Byers was straightforward. According to him:

> In 1979 there was a direction clearly embedded in the minds of board members. The board's desire was to develop a more participative system for responding to a diverse student population. This charge was not particularly born of crisis, but by an eroding confidence in the

authoritarianism of the previous superintendent. The board's vision boiled down to developing a sound instructional program for a diverse population by increasing participation of stakeholders in the educational process.

From the outset of Byers' tenure, he and the Board worked closely together on shaping a new agenda for the district and installing a new central office structure, procedures, and personnel. By 1982, the Board and newly constituted management team (superintendent and all other administrators) drew up a "Principles of Governance for the Sequoia Valley School District" which conveyed new values for participation and communication districtwide. In the minds of the Board and Superintendent, the new "Principles" symbolized a more humane spirit and code of ethics for teachers and themselves in the course of conducting business within the district and for communicating and working with parents and the community.

By 1982 Byers' revitalization efforts had taken root. A new deputy superintendent for curriculum and a director of business were hired. An early retirement program was installed, which resulted in a thirty percent turnover of older teachers in five years. Bilingual programs were installed in "minority-impacted" schools. Byers and the leadership of Sequoia Valley Teachers Association began to meet frequently and informally to resolve old issues and shed the adversarial roles each side had developed under the previous administration. A Superintendent's Advisory Council (including one board member, one teacher union official, two principals, and two central office administrators) was created to broaden the base of districtwide input and decisionmaking. Finally, a long range plan was developed for the next five years which outlined: aggressive political action to secure better funding; districtwide curriculum development; funding redistribution within the

district, sending more dollars directly to schools; and further involvement of the Superintendent and Board in strategic planning.

From 1979 to 1984, the initial goals of Byers and the School Board were firmly established. A new climate of trust and participation had been successfully created. Although Sequoia Valley's money problems had not been alleviated, old problems were being tackled, new ideas were being infused, and teachers and administrators came to feel that they had a more personal stake in the direction of their school district.

The Advent of Restructuring: Strategic Planning and School-Based Management

Superintendent Hilton Byers continued to transform Sequoia Valley School District in 1985 by articulating a new vision of restructuring midway through his twelve year tenure. Both he and the School Board received initial training from a prominent restructuring specialist. Their experience led to the creation of a mission statement[5] and a comprehensive strategic plan which provided a framework for school restructuring.

Strategic Planning in the Sequoia School District: Strategies for Success (Sequoia Valley, 1987), written by Byers and members of the district's new Strategic Planning Committee, emphasized the harsh realities of the rapidly changing school population in Sequoia Valley as a justification to restructure. Although elements of the district's curriculum and traditional teacher-centered instructional practices were roughly targeted for improvement, Byers and the Board repeatedly stressed that teachers and site administrators were best qualified to redesign the instructional program at each school. Little specificity was given for a new curriculum or instructional agenda for the classroom. The *Strategic Plan* also mandated sweeping new programs in early

childhood education, bilingual education, middle school reconfiguration, at-risk intervention, the application of technology, staff development, and partnerships with the community.

The Superintendent and Board adopted a philosophy of school-based management and rekindled the vitality of the school site council system which already existed through California's School Improvement Program (SIP) funds. Parent and teacher representatives with the principal were required to write a three year schoolwide SIP Plan and monitor all aspects of the school program. District sponsored training for site council participation was minimal, however, and the role played by the site councils at each school varied greatly.

Byers' effort to realize his vision for a decentralized district was substantially aided by his popularity among teachers and principals. An articulate and well-educated spokesperson for education, Byers was able to convey the necessity for change in Sequoia Valley while being patient in motivating personnel throughout his restructuring effort.

Byers further cultivated the School Board, which was committed to long term change, by encouraging their direct participation in many district committees. Byers and the Board pushed for the departure of principals who had been in the district for many years and hired several new ones who were energetic and eager to implement school-based management. Byers' vision and the positive energy infused in the system were welcomed by most teachers, particularly when their involvement was being solicited in site councils, school-based planning, and district committees.

Because of the racial and socio-economic diversity among the district's schools, the Superintendent and Board encouraged different goals and programs at each site. Over time, however, it became evident that some

schools were undergoing rapid transformation while others remained anchored to the status quo. In schools with strong parental involvement, parents became the caretakers of the school program. In schools with strong principals, principals become the chief engineers for change. In schools with weaker principals and little parent support, the heavy glue of past practice appeared to remain set. Despite the unifying theme of change, the initial pattern of district restructuring became a fragmented one, bearing a variety of interpretations of meaning and direction. And until Byers' retirement in 1990 fourteen principals, fourteen site councils, and three hundred teachers struggled to reduce this ambiguity.

Not only did fourteen schools simultaneously begin a search for individual direction, factors unique to each school exacerbated the problems inherent to adaptability and school improvement. Even among the schools that underwent the greatest change, much of what was accomplished during this early stage were modifications and improvements within the existing structure of the classroom and school.

The major structural links between central administration and the schools were the site council system, the school planning process, and the district's *Strategic Plan*. The theme of restructuring carried with it a moral imperative for change and a mandate to involve the community in a partnership. Exactly which elements of a school's program should be improved remained unstated, except through board member feedback on the annual occasion of the SIP Plan review. Precisely how far parents could become involved in school governance was also left to school level interpretation.

Restructuring Redirected: Centralization by Committee and Program

The irony that restructuring might be perpetuating the status quo in only a modestly renewed context was not lost on the School Board or Superintendent Byers. By 1988 the board frequently discussed the problems common to all schools in the district. The issues identified included: at-risk youth, bilingual education, drug education, early childhood education and daycare, homogeneous grouping practices, new special education models, mathematics curriculum, and junior high transformation to middle schools.

The most preferred methods of initially dealing with these problems became the district committee and the pilot program. More than a dozen committees and task forces met throughout a period of several years. Current research and knowledge of successful practices were applied to existing programs or were used to develop new ones. In some instances the intent was simply to build general awareness and instill new values in teachers and administrators. In other instances, the effect was to construct a model program from rechanneled funds or to go to foundations and universities for financial and programmatic assistance.

New ideas and programs blossomed in this stage of restructuring. Faculty from Stanford University and Arizona State University were enlisted to help establish model school programs such as "accelerated schools" and "whole language". An early childhood specialist was hired to create a model "primary education center". "Bilingual newcomer centers" were installed at three sites for recent immigrant students. Three schools were made into model cooperative learning schools. One school became involved with a collegial assessment model of evaluation. Heterogeneous grouping was mandated as standard practice at the middle schools. "Outreach specialists" were placed in schools to help meet the needs of at-risk students. Staff

development was decentralized and resource teachers were placed at each school. One school even built a "farm" as a feature to promote community involvement with the school's program.

The influence of consultants and newly hired program managers appeared to alter the scope and definition of restructuring as new district level programs began to compete with school-based efforts of change. Programs involving extensive staff development, such as cooperative learning, required the authority to plan and manage programs parallel to and sometimes exclusive from the principal; and they further required a singular focus for a school's agenda for change.

Confusion and heated debate inevitably resulted from the lack of clear definition and from the overload of new programs. Was restructuring going to be a centralized, program-driven process in which schools would obligingly align with problems and solutions identified by Board members, the Superintendent, and district level committees? Or, was restructuring going to remain a school-based process with the district office playing a supporting role?

The answer was both. The philosophy of school-based management and strong site councils continued to be heartily espoused by the Superintendent and Board. But they also had committed significant resources to new programs and had installed program specialists in key administrative roles throughout the district. Thus, it became apparent that Sequoia Valley's leaders had inadvertently created oppositional dynamics for change and that during this middle stage the climate for restructuring had become more contentious than collaborative.

Restructuring on Hold: Anticipating Turnover and Transition

The shifting philosophy and decisionmaking of the Board and Superintendent created conflict with principals and other managers who saw themselves caught between district level and school level change. The morale of the district's middle managers worsened as school-based plans for improvement were criticized by members of the School Board for not conforming to their notions of school improvement. Over time, several principals began to withdraw their support for central committees and for large scale programs which they believed were not well-designed for the needs of their schools.

The Sequoia Valley Teachers' Association became increasingly rancorous and demanded greater input to district decisionmaking, more control in limiting high cost programs, and greater pay for greater services rendered in the new shared decisionmaking model. Some school staffs became openly critical of the Board and Superintendent because they believed monies were seen being diverted from wages and school budgets. In one instance, with the support of the state teacher union, the teachers openly challenged the School Board and Superintendent Byers and accused them of giving no real powers to teachers to actually control their school program or hire personnel appropriate to their needs.

Superintendent Byers' announcement to retire in the spring of 1990 signaled the end of a leadership era in Sequoia Valley School District. Although districtwide program implementation and school-based planning continued, it became clear that much of Sequoia Valley's momentum for restructuring had dissipated at least temporarily. When the board chose Richard Singleton as the new superintendent the message was both clear and not. What was clear was that a new day was dawning. The district needed a

more coherent approach to change. The preferred themes now were accountability and assessment. What was not clear was whether the great experiment of restructuring was at a close or if the district simply had come to a much needed point reflection and redirection.

New Leadership, New Outcome-Based Goals

Superintendent Richard Singleton was hired from Desert Sands School District (Arizona) in the summer of 1990. His advocacy for tight school-based accountability and multiple methods of assessing student performance was well matched to the agenda for leadership sought by the Sequoia Valley School Board. The Board's selection of Singleton represented more than just a new style of leadership from outside the Sequoia Valley's system to replace the retiring Hilton Byers. It signaled a new emphasis on specific districtwide performance indicators, meaning that both the district and the schools were expected to have much more clearly articulated standards and objectives. It also meant that schools were expected to generate higher test scores and employ a systematic means of assessing their students.

In this regard, the change from Byers to Singleton was a dramatic one in the eyes of many teachers. As one teacher put it,

> Hilton was a real educator . . . a philosopher really. He had a vision and he understood how to get us there. Singleton has one thing in mind: jacking up test scores. He has been a cheerleader for better performance, but he doesn't know us and he doesn't know how. I think he thinks he can get us to change by command.

From the point of view of the only remaining Board member who had served with Byers from 1980 and had helped hire Singleton, a similar perception was echoed:

> The rap on Dick is that he is not a visionary. He has consistently and doggedly pursued our Strategic Plan. He was hired to make sure what was written will happen. . . . But I'm afraid his way of doing things is not going down well with teachers.

Singleton's hiring also called into question the School Board's commitment to restructuring the school district, specifically the system of school-based management installed by Byers. Singleton believes that,

> School-based management is still important. But my job is to bring about clarity in what kids learn. The Board and I have completely reorganized the Strategic Plan to define and require specific student outcomes. It is also my responsibility to tighten the rules for what school site councils can decide and what they are responsible for.

Singleton's strategy for change rests on three principles. First, instruction must be based on assessment. If student outcomes cannot be assessed, then teaching practices predicated toward specific ends should be dropped. Second, school personnel and parents must understand the importance of school-based accountability. Site councils must provide to the Board extensive plans for all aspects of the school program, particularly in the areas of increasing student performance, measuring student assessment, and responding to special needs students such as those in programs for special education, gifted, non-English speaking students. Third, the district must assume ultimate responsibility for developing systemwide performance indicators and assessment instruments.

Singleton hired an outside consultant to work with central office administrators, principals, and teachers to develop prototype assessment instruments and districtwide standards and objectives for language arts and mathematics. The responsibility was then given to two district resource

teachers and a classroom teacher on leave to conduct workshops with clusters of three school staffs at a time for further refinement of performance-based assessment. One of the resource teachers commented on this process:

> You know, it's kind of embarrassing. I know we need to have more accountability within the district, but we are losing the hearts of some of our best teachers by making them conform to narrower sets of objectives. This flies in the face of the work that had been done in cooperative learning, whole language, and the early childhood curriculum.

The School Board's selection of Singleton and their combined effort to make the schools more accountable has raised concern from numerous individuals in Sequoia Valley's School District. On one hand, teachers and administrators acknowledge the need to enhance student performance and increase test scores. On the other hand, many of those interviewed related feelings of loss with the more philosophically-based vision for education in Sequoia Valley being replaced by the new superintendent's agenda of accountability and assessment.

Singleton is emphatic, nevertheless, that his agenda is consistent with the original vision of district restructuring.

> We are still committed to restructuring. The board and I are still promoting the value system established by Hilton Byers which was defined by the importance of site-based collaboration to make the important decisions about education. But I envision a much different look for our schools. Our schools had become too different from one another with regard to different programs and expectations from school to school. Our new assessment standards will eventually force instruction to be delivered in a certain and more uniform manner.

During his second year as superintendent, Singleton continues to enjoy public support from his Board. This support is due largely to his efforts to design of an outcome-based instructional program. As one member stated,

> Through all of our periods of change, Dick is the only person who has pressed us to require specific outcomes for students. I believe there is real hope for us now because instruction will be driven by our performance indicators. It will still be up to the schools to decide how district expectations will be met, so I'm not worried about investing more power in the central office for now.

This same Board member privately conceded, however, that the Superintendent's new agenda is not being readily accepted by district teachers. "I fear that teachers see our plans for outcome-driven education, as an extension of restructuring in Sequoia Valley School District, as just another program being pushed on them from the central office."

A county school levy failure in the fall of 1991 which Singleton and the Board publicly supported, coupled with state cutbacks in education have compounded the Superintendent's difficulties in maintaining costly programs and services, let alone fueling staff development activities for training in performance-based assessment. Morale among teachers and administrators is low and the bright vision cast by Hilton Byers is apparently beginning to fade rapidly. The comment on the current status of Sequoia Valley School District was provided by a teacher who, in her words, had "seen it all" since Hilton Byers was hired.

> You know, it used to be fun around here. Lots of things were happening. I didn't know where we were going half the time, but that was OK. Now, it just feels like something died. This feels like work.

FINDINGS

A pattern of adaptive realignment is clearly demonstrated in the case of restructuring in Sequoia Valley School District. During the twelve years of this case study, Sequoia Valley experienced five different periods of realignment. One or more of the key dynamics (themes) account for a fundamental redirection or reorientation of the district within each period. These dynamics and the effect they had on restructuring are summarized below. I then discuss the cumulative effect of each period and offer an interpretation of the broader pattern of adaptive realignment.

1979-84: Improving Organizational Image and Substance. Before the concept of restructuring was formally introduced, Superintendent Byers and the School Board laid the groundwork for revitalizing the district by installing a new code of ethics and procedures, and by hiring many new teachers and a few key central office administrators. The vision for the district was an open and caring organization which valued the input of its members. Decentralizing decisionmaking and divesting more power in the schools were part of Byers' central strategy. Beginning in 1979 and running throughout this case is the close working relationship between the School Board and both superintendents. Rarely did one make a move without the involvement and approval of the other. And although both encouraged broad participation and attempted to "flatten the hierarchy", in tandem the Board and Superintendent designed, closely monitored, and controlled change throughout this case.

Administrative turnover in this early stage had enormous impact on the goals and strategy of the district. Contrary to the literature, the superintendent who was promoted from within had considerable effect on

the status quo of the organization, although Byers' appointment was a clear signal from the Board that a new day was at hand in Sequoia Valley School District.

1985-87: Articulating the Rhetoric of Restructuring. Building on its earlier success and taking a lead from their training in restructuring, the Superintendent and Board mapped a districtwide vision and strategy in their *Strategic Plan*. School-based management was formally installed, requiring school site councils to plan their instructional programs and to involve parents in decisionmaking. Several principals, most of whom were from outside the school district, were hired to implement school-based management. Although the effects of decentralized decisionmaking across all schools were mixed, the climate within the school district was decidedly enthusiastic for change.

Conceptually, the schools were now in charge of their destinies. Centralized planning and control, however, were never absent. During this period, modification and response to the initial goals was handled through the Strategic Planning Committee which was initially weighted with central office administrators, teacher union representatives, and members of the School Board. The Sequoia Valley was in an expansive mode with a variety of districtwide programs waiting to be born.

1987-89: Reclaiming the Reins of Control. An ill-defined curriculum, unclear rules about how far site-based management could go, and the lack of innovative instruction were among the problems that prompted the Superintendent and Board to install new centralized committees, create districtwide and pilot programs, and hire new program administrators from outside the district. The importance of school-based management was a still a

pervasive theme, but restructuring became increasingly defined and managed by central office administrators.

In this period there was a proliferation of new ideas and programs which created on one hand a mini-educational renaissance, but on the other hand sparked conflict between central office personnel armed with new programs and principals who were now grounded in school-based management. The squeeze exerted on principals and site-councils was considerable, inducing disenchantment and further fragmentation of the meaning and process of restructuring.

1990: Restructuring on Hold. The departure of Hilton Byers had enormous consequences for restructuring. Between the announcement and his actual retirement, the vision and spirit of change were deflated, leaving teachers and administrators wondering what direction the Board would take through its new selection. In 1990, the control of restructuring rested solely in the hands of the Board as they searched for a new superintendent who would, in the minds of its members, take restructuring to its next logical steps of assessment and accountability.

1990-91: Refinement or Rejection? From the outset, Richard Singleton and the Board claimed congruity with the vision of restructuring from the Hilton Byers era. Their strategy was to consolidate centralized authority through districtwide assessment of student progress. Under Singleton, the central office, not the schools, would define what would be tested and how. Although the site councils were not abolished, Singleton's approach had an effect of delimiting the power of schools to determine their programs.

Singleton and the Board retain a united public front, but within the course of only a year, doubts from within the Board are expressed about

Singleton's leadership style and there is concern for the morale of teachers and administrators. Interestingly, Singleton's selection was driven by the belief that restructuring was not taking root. It was also the Board's unwavering belief that significant instructional improvement could be made to happen through more assessment which now appears to have led to the decline, and possibly the outright rejection of Byers' vision of Sequoia Valley School District as an open and thriving organization guided by the best ideas and will of its teachers, administrators, and parents.

The Pattern of Change: Chaos or Coherence? The question of whether Richard Singleton's administration will prove to be a refinement to the overall restructuring process in Sequoia Valley or in fact will lead to its demise must be left hanging until the end of his tenure. This is perhaps a telling epilogue, however, because the pattern of complex change is open to interpretation.

Throughout an entire decade and beyond, a stable school board and a visionary superintendent were dedicated to planned change. Their blueprints integrated many of the themes and ideas which came to be successfully adopted by other restructuring districts. They were able to attract talented teachers and administrators to their cause. Similarly, they were adept at rallying long time employees to a new set of values and a new organizational spirit.

There was, however, a distinct ambivalence about organizational control. The message from both superintendents and the Board was the high value they placed on site-based decisionmaking. And while school site-councils became increasingly experienced in planning for change at their sites, the Board and central office administrators continued to invest in centralized problem solving and centralized control of restructuring. The motivation for

this was not, I believe, driven by the need to hold on to power for power's sake. Nor was it done consciously to simply meddle in the affairs of the schools to demonstrate, if only symbolically, that the superintendents and Board were playing a vital role in school-based change.

Rather, I view the introduction of formal restructuring in 1985 as the opening of a Pandora's Box from which flowed a turbulent mixture of emotion, ideas, and questions from teachers, principals, and parents. What would change mean in their lives? How would they learn new skills and what would those skills be? How much power would parents and teachers really have? What do we really want for our children?

The expectations of the Board and Byers were extremely high, based in part by their own enthusiasm and in part by their belief in what Sequoia Valley School District could become. Their close contact and extensive planning together accelerated their expectations for change to come more quickly than school district personnel could respond. When problems persisted they found solutions they believed *they* could remedy. The uneasiness, conflict, and resistance over school-based management expressed by teachers and principals began to muddy the path toward the ends they envisioned -- prompting them to look for higher, more stable ground which they found in centralized problem solving and committees, and even in a new superintendent whose philosophy was based on tighter centralized accountability.

Despite intermittent chaos and confusion, the preference for centralization created a coherent pattern change. When the Board and superintendents found that decentralization was not a sufficient mechanism for restructuring education districtwide, they consistently overrode the power of principals to act as autonomous local leaders and perhaps unknowingly

thwarted the ability of teachers to fully engage in a transformation of their own skills and classroom practices.

The search for coherence in Sequoia Valley School District ultimately did not make restructuring a fluid, improvisational process of achieving visionary goals by empowering teachers, administrators, and parents to transform education in their schools. Rather, it transformed the ideals of restructuring into a comparatively predictable process of basic instructional reform, scripted by the hands of a number of powerful committees, a stalwart school board, and heroic rescuer-leaders.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion I offer three observations from this case which may be both apparent and understated. First, there exists an enormous gap between the rhetoric and reality of restructuring. The ideals and vision of restructured schools, however bold a departure they may be from the status quo, are infinitely easier to articulate and plan for than to actualize. Among the many conditions that are needed to sustain change, time may be the most important. In this case, school officials became frustrated after only few years when striking results were not evident. It is not realistic to think that new values and new practices can be integrated within individuals or complex organizations in a speedy fashion. And for that reason, organizational leaders should not be tempted to overreact or realign as quickly as they did in Sequoia Valley.

Second, political pressure for change may be a more helpful ingredient to the change formula than expressed in the literature. In this case, there was virtually no outside political pressure. The vice and the virtue of the Sequoia

Valley School Board was that its members became major *internal* players in the change process. Lacking overt criticism and pressure from the community, the Board simply was not able to command more assertive influence while it was trying gain the cooperation of teachers and administrators. This was an irresolvable problem for the Sequoia Board, but it may indicate to other school officials that they may be better served by utilizing, not deflecting external political pressure for educational reform in their districts. Although a good deal of time is needed for change, pressure from the community may help accelerate the adoption of new classroom practices and curricular programs.

Last, the choice between a bureaucratic form of restructuring and one premised upon teacher empowerment, suggested earlier (Hargreaves, 1991), in the long run, may not be a healthy proposition from which to begin restructuring. There is no doubt from the literature that the American educational community has yet to experience a great number of truly "teacher-empowered" school districts. The few in which teachers and principals do have major voice are characterized by an integration of school-based autonomy and centralized support for change and improvement. But the potential of genuine empowerment of principals, teachers, and parents in schools, as attempted in the case of Sequoia Valley School District, remains relatively untapped. Until this vein of power and ideas is more fully mined, it is unrealistic to think that bureaucratic leadership can overcome itself.

NOTES

1. Pseudonyms are used for the names of the school districts and individuals in this case.

2. Taken from the title of Joseph Murphy's *Restructuring Schools: Capturing and Assessing the Phenomena* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991).

3. The use of "minority" refers to students from traditional racial-ethnic backgrounds such as African-American, Mexican-American, and Southeast Asian countries, even though in Sequoia Valley and elsewhere in California, traditional minorities are now the new majority.

4. There were numerous membership changes on the Sequoia Valley School Board from 1979 to 1991. Only one member member served nearly the entirety of this case (1980-91). No individual Board members stands out for playing a singular, pivotal role in this case. Nor did the Board and its many members deviate from a close working relationship with either superintendent.

5. The mission statement reads: The Sequoia Valley School District will work in partnership with parents and the community to help youth develop a positive vision of the future and acquire the attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary to become successful, contributing participants in a rapidly changing world.

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